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A note on the translation

Peter Dent

Frans Hemsterhuis (1721-1790) was the most influential Dutch philosopher of the eighteenth century. He studied at Leiden University, where his father was a professor of Greek, and later worked as secretary to the Council of State in the Hague. His earliest published works – *Lettre sur une pierre antique* (1762) and *Lettre sur la sculpture* (1769) – are both of art historical interest. These two letters were addressed to the same recipient, Theodore de Smeth, a merchant-banker and former president of the council of aldermen at Amsterdam, and both refer to works of art in de Smeth's collection. The *Lettre sur une pierre antique* was apparently circulated in 1762 but remained largely unknown, whereas the *Lettre sur la Sculpture* received a much wider readership, most notably Johann Gottfried Herder, author of *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream* (1778), who hoped to have it translated into German. The *Letter sur une pierre antique* takes an engraved gemstone as its subject and is fairly short and descriptive, but the *Lettre sur la Sculpture* is much longer and ranges from philosophical propositions about the nature of beauty in general, through sculptural aesthetics in particular, and on into a history of sculptural form. The volume is prefaced by a short notice from the editor (not translated here), presumably Marc-Michel Rey, publisher of various significant Enlightenment figures, including Rousseau and Diderot (who met Hemsterhuis and wrote a commentary on one of his other works). Rey claims that the letter was printed on his initiative after he was struck by the novelty of its discussion of beauty. Hemsterhuis apparently believed that publication would not be a successful venture and granted permission on the condition that Rey took all responsibility.

For further information, the reader is directed to the following editions:

F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettre sur la Sculpture, précédée de la Lettre sur une pierre antique*, Emmanuelle Baillon and Sophie Rabau (eds), Paris, Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 1991

F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sulla Scultura*, Elio Matassi (ed.) and Ines Crispini and Donatella Scalabrino (trans), Palermo, Aesthetica, 1994

F. Hemsterhuis, *Escritos sobre estética: Carta sobre la Escultura. Simón, o de las facultades del alma*, Manuel Pérez Cornejo (ed., and trans), València, Universitat de València, 1996

F. Hemsterhuis, *Wijsgerige Werke*, M. J. Petry (ed.), Budel, Damon, 2001

F. Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques: édition critique*, Jacob van Sluis (ed.), Leiden, Brill, 2015

A short extract from the letter was published in English translation by Jonathan Murphy in C. Harrison, P. Wood and J. Gaiger (eds), *Art in Theory: 1648-1815*, Cambridge Mass., Blackwell, 2000, pp. 639-40. A section is also anthologised in the useful Italian volume on sculptural aesthetics: Luigi Russo (ed.), *L'estetica della Scultura*, Palermo, Aesthetica, 2003, pp. 185-87.

Rather than duplicate the work already available in the existing critical editions and weigh the text down with scholarly apparatus and commentary, we have chosen instead to publish the translation of the *Letter* along with an extended interpretative essay by Professor Jason Gaiger, which appears as a separate article in this issue of the journal. For Prof. Gaiger's work on Herder's sculptural aesthetics, for which Hemsterhuis's letter was influential, see J. G. Herder, *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*, J. Gaiger (ed., and trans.), Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Hemsterhuis's original figure references have been maintained in the text and the figure numbers as reproduced here provided in brackets. Letters appearing in brackets refer to Hemsterhuis's remarks a to f that are appended to his main text.

The figures are reproduced from the digitised 1769 edition available through the University of Heidelberg (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/hemsterhuis1769>). This volume is held in the Vatican and once belonged to the pioneering Venetian historian of sculpture and friend of Canova, Count Leopoldo Cicognara (see <https://www.cicognara.org/>). The shelf mark is Cicognara no. 1161 [Vatican no. V M 26 (1)].

This translation is based on an initial version that kept very close to the word order and syntax of Hemsterhuis's original (of which a copy can be made available on request), but it was then edited for readability in English. The original paragraphing has been maintained for ease of reference, but the punctuation has been modernised for the sake of clarity. Although the letter is relatively short, Hemsterhuis's exposition is at times dense and convoluted as he moves rapidly across a range of topics. The translation aims to preserve something of this flavour. I am very grateful to Jason Gaiger and Alexandra Gerstein for their helpful suggestions.